

Benefit Issuance

Overview

Benefit issuance is the process of providing school meal benefits to students who are eligible. The process of determining a student's benefits may involve a free and reduced application, direct certification, or categorical eligibility. Maintaining a benefit issuance list, also known as a roster, is a key component of the benefit issuance process. A school that provides Provision 2 for **both** breakfast and lunch **or** Community Eligibility (CEP) will maintain a list of children enrolled in school, but will not have to maintain a traditional benefits issuance list as explained in this section.

Please refer to the most current Eligibility Manual for School Meals and Direct Certification and Verification sections of this reference guide for additional details on the process of determining a student's eligibility status and, therefore, what meal benefits they will receive.

Terminology

Benefit Issuance List - A document (can be electronic or handwritten) that lists each student enrolled in the school and their school meal benefits status- free, reduced, or paid. This document must be kept confidential. Accurate maintenance of this document is a requirement of the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program.

Categorical Eligibility- Those children approved without an application to receive free school meals. A child is categorically eligible for free school meals if they are: in foster care where the court has the legal responsibility for the child; enrolled in Head Start; living in a household receiving SNAP, Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR), and/or TAFI benefits, homeless, or migrant and they are certified by the Homeless or Migrant Liaison (signed on a list provided by the Liaison), or are a match on the Direct Certification list.

Certification/Determination- When eligibility status is determined for each student.

Direct Certification (DC) - A method in which a child is eligible for free meals based on documentation obtained directly from the appropriate State or local agency authorized to certify that the child is a member of a household receiving assistance under SNAP, FDPIR or TAFI programs, and/or is a Foster, Homeless, Migrant, Head Start, or Runaway child.

Free and Reduced Price School Meals Application- Application completed by families and turned into the school district, providing household and income information that is used to determine if the family qualifies for free or reduced price benefits.

Homeless/Migrant List- List of students, from the appropriate school district liaison, who are homeless or migrant. The list(s) must be signed and dated by the liaison and retained on file.

Overt Identification- Any action that may result in a child being recognized as potentially eligible to receive or be certified for free or reduced price school meals or free milk.

Point of Service (POS) - The point in the food service operation where a determination can accurately be made that a reimbursable free, reduced price, or paid lunch has been served to an eligible child.

What is Benefit Issuance?

Benefit issuance is the process of providing school meal benefits to students who are eligible. A student's eligibility is determined by a completed free and reduced price meal application from their household, direct certification, or establishing categorical eligibility. The eligibility status of each student enrolled in the school must be documented and updated as appropriate on a master record, known as a benefit issuance list or roster. Schools or districts may have more than one benefit issuance list, as long as there is a complete or master list/roster that includes all of the students. Maintaining an accurate, updated benefit issuance list is a requirement of the NSLP and SBP and the list will be reviewed by the State agency (SA) during an Administrative Review. The list(s) may be stored electronically or in hard copy depending on the POS system used by the school. The list(s) should be updated as needed, whenever a student is added or whenever a student's status changes. If the list is not automated, then the date updated and determining official's signature must be recorded on the printed list(s). The compilation of the benefit issuance list occurs through determination of Free and Reduced Priced Applications, accessing directly certified lists on the electronic State matching system, communicating with the appropriate agencies/individuals to confirm names of migrant, homeless, runaway, and foster students, and students enrolled in Head Start, and completing the verification process.

The benefit issuance list must contain the following information (at the minimum):

- Student's first and last name
- Benefit status (free/reduced)
- Method of certification (DC/categorically eligible/application)
- Date of certification
- School name
- Total number of eligible students in SFA

The Verification Detail Report, available in MyIdahoCNP under Download Forms, may be used as a template for a benefit issuance list.

The cashier must have a complete, up-to-date, and accurate benefit issuance list of free and reduced students. For schools utilizing a POS software system that displays the student list and eligibility status, it is recommended that a backup paper copy of the list be kept at the cashier station in case the electronic system goes down.

Remember:

- Benefit issuance list(s) must be updated as changes occur (withdrawals, additions, changes in category). All changes should be dated to reflect when they occurred.
- The student information on benefit issuance lists is highly confidential. The information should not be made available to all school officials. Only those who are directly responsible for the ongoing operation of the nutrition program or responsible for monitoring program compliance should have access. The list/roster(s) should never be faxed or emailed due to the possibility of the secure information being inadvertently exposed or shared with others. If mailing a list, it must not go by regular mail, but a secure form of mailing.

Schools must ensure, to the maximum extent practicable, that students are not overtly identified as receiving free or reduced priced benefits to their peers and other school staff. Please refer to the Eligibility Manual for additional information on disclosure of student eligibility data to programs and individuals outside the food service operation.

Why is Benefit Issuance Important?

All SFAs participating in the NSLP or SBP must make free and reduced meals available to eligible children and all SFAs participating in the Special Milk Program providing applications must make free milk available to all eligible children. The proper execution of the benefit issuance process ensures children in low income families are able to get the benefits of receiving healthy, nutrient filled meals at school. Meals provided at school may be the only well balanced meals students in low income families receive each day, making school meals critical for the health, wellness, and success of these children.

The benefit issuance process and an accurate, updated benefit issuance list are necessary to track the service of free, reduced and paid price meals. This accurate tracking allows the food service department to maintain accurate claiming counts of how many free, reduced, and paid meals were served, and therefore submit an accurate claim to the SA and receive reimbursement for the meals served.

Resources

Additional resources may be available for this topic. Please check the Idaho School Nutrition Reference Guide website for copies of manuals, user guides and helpful links to relevant subject matter.